

General Board Report Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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(Forthcoming January 2027 The Living Waters Region)
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Greetings, friends.

It is truly an honor to be with you for my first General Board meeting. I come with deep gratitude for the faithfulness, wisdom, and leadership represented in this room and across the life of the church.

I enter this space with humility, knowing I am stepping into a long and faithful story, and with hope, trusting that the Spirit continues to guide us into new expressions of ministry and witness. This is a season that calls for courage, imagination, and deep grounding in our shared values. I am eager to listen, to learn, and to join you in the sacred work of discernment—seeking not simply what is efficient or familiar, but what is faithful.

I am thankful for the opportunity to serve alongside you, for your commitment to the whole church, and for the ways you hold together vision, accountability, and care. I look forward to our time together and to the work God is doing among us and through us.

An Accomplishment from 2025

The most significant accomplishment in 2025 for our congregations in Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin was the formal adoption of a constitution and bylaws for what will become the Living Waters Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)—a unified regional expression combining the former Illinois/Wisconsin and Michigan regions.

This milestone was approved at a joint Regional Assembly in Tinley Park, Illinois, in October 2025. With the affirmation of the Regional Church Councils and boards, a clear structure and shared name were established, with the merger effective January 1, 2027.

In 2025, the search committee also recommended Rev. Dr. William E. Crowder, Jr. to serve as the first Regional Minister and President of the Living Waters Region, reflecting confidence in his leadership to guide this newly merged region into its next season of ministry.

With leadership in place, we now turn toward strengthening shared identity and cohesion across congregations, deepening collaborative ministry efforts, and continuing to lift up our Disciples commitments to welcome, justice, anti-racism, and vibrant community engagement.

A Hope for 2026

My hope for 2026 is that the General Church will come to know that my work is rooted in accompaniment.

I see my role as walking alongside clergy, congregations, and leaders—listening deeply, strengthening what is already faithful, and helping communities discern what God is calling them to next.

My work is inseparable from mission. Worship does not end on Sunday; it continues Monday through Saturday in how we engage our work, care for the planet, love our neighbors, and show up in our communities. Faithfulness is expressed not only in what we proclaim in sanctuaries, but in how we live, serve, and seek justice in the world.

I am focusing on cultivating healthy leaders, resilient congregations, and a regional culture shaped by trust, collaboration, and spiritual depth—while remaining attentive to the realities clergy and lay leaders are facing: change fatigue, financial anxiety, vocational discernment, and the need for practices that support wellness and wholeness.

At its core, this work is about helping the future Living Waters Region move:

- from maintenance to mission,
- from scarcity to abundance,
- from isolation to shared ministry—

So that together we may live more fully into God's call in this season.

Challenges Ahead

1. Change Fatigue

Our Region has lived through seasons of mergers, restructuring, and profound cultural shifts. While necessary, these changes have also been exhausting for clergy and congregations alike.

The question is not whether change will continue—it will—but whether we will pace that change with pastoral sensitivity, spiritual grounding, and deep trust in God’s presence among us. Courage in this moment looks like slowing down enough to listen, pray, and heal, even as we keep moving forward.

2. Financial Sustainability

Declining membership and rising costs press us to confront hard financial realities. Yet the deeper challenge is spiritual. We must move from narratives of scarcity and survival toward a theology of stewardship rooted in God’s abundance.

This requires helping congregations reimagine faithfulness—not merely as keeping doors open, but as aligning resources with mission, generosity, and community impact.

3. Geographic and Cultural Diversity

Serving dense urban centers, small towns, and rural congregations across three states means one size will not fit all.

Our challenge is to honor the particularities of place and culture while holding fast to shared identity and purpose. Courage here means embracing difference without fragmentation, listening across contexts, and trusting that unity does not require uniformity.

4. Clergy, Laity, and Congregational Wellness

Across our Region, many clergy and lay leaders are carrying deep fatigue, grief, and burnout. The weight of constant change and limited resources has taken a toll.

We must resist normalizing exhaustion as faithfulness.

Courage in this moment means reclaiming Sabbath, mutual care, and healthy boundaries as spiritual practices—not luxuries. The long-term vitality of our congregations and the integrity of our witness depend on leaders and communities who are not merely surviving, but being made whole.

Connecting and Empowering Congregations

This season of ministry has been intentionally focused on introduction, relationship-building, and deep listening. I am currently 132 days into this role, and my initial work has centered on presence—learning the stories, hopes, and realities of clergy, staff, and congregations across the Region. To date, I have visited 12 Churches in our region, met with our committee on ministry and engaged three clergy clusters and many more to come.

To that end, I have traveled more than 4,000 miles by car and an additional 2000 miles by air. This presence is not symbolic; it reflects a theological conviction that connection is essential to our witness. In a time marked by fragmentation and isolation, strengthening the connective tissue of the Region has been a primary focus—linking congregations with one another, pastors with colleagues, and local ministries with the wider life of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

A Story of Strength and Hope

During the Christmas season, Parkway Garden Christian Church—a historic Black congregation on the South Side of Chicago—partnered with First Christian Church of Downers Grove, a predominantly White congregation, in a shared ministry of love and service with children and families in O-Block.

This partnership bore witness to the Gospel's call to unity, justice, and embodied love across racial, cultural, and geographic boundaries. Members worked side by side to provide Christmas gifts, food, and tangible expressions of care to families too often overlooked—yet always deeply known and cherished by God.

What made this collaboration life-giving was not only what was given, but what was shared: relationship, trust, and a willingness to cross lines that have too often divided the Church.

This was not charity at a distance, but incarnational ministry rooted in mutual respect and shared purpose. More than seasonal outreach, it became a sign of what is possible when the Church chooses reconciliation over separation and collaboration over comfort. It stands as a powerful example of how congregations from different racial and cultural contexts can embody the reconciling love of Christ—offering hope, dignity, and joy while strengthening the Church's public witness in a divided world.

Moving Forward

1. **Impanel a Nominating Committee**
Establishing a nominating committee to identify and set officers in place is essential for stability, accountability, and shared leadership.
2. **Initiate Vision, Mission, and Values Work for 2027 and Beyond**
I recommend forming a Vision, Mission, and Values Team to guide discernment for the Living Waters Region. This work is spiritual and missional, allowing broad participation and clarity of identity and purpose.
3. **Advance Governance Alignment**
As the new regional structure takes shape, the governance team is addressing policies and procedures that will support cohesion and shared ministry. I am grateful for Dr. Beth Rupe's leadership in this work.

Important Dates to Note

- April 26 – Pastor Suzanne Stout Retirement
- May 10 – Sollomon's (Youngest Son's) College Graduation Howard University
- July 10–11 – Online General Assembly
- July 12 – 207th Church Anniversary, Barney's Prairie CC
- October 2–3 – Regional Assembly and Installation

Ongoing Meetings:

- Mondays – CCIW Associate Regional Ministers Meeting
- 2nd Thursday – Regional Associates Michigan Meeting
- Monthly All-Staff (every other month in person)